

objections. And quite frankly, it would be surprising if an operation such as the one carried out by the *Gruppo di Ferrara* had raised no perplexities: they will, after all, restore a version of the *Comedy* (that is, a text that almost every Italian and many international readers know intimately well) to which our ears are not accustomed. This volume is a must read for anyone planning to evaluate their new *Comedy*. It documents the rigor, spirit of collaboration (among the members of the group as well as with the rest of the community of Dante scholars and philologists), and methodological innovations that made the experience of the *Gruppo di Ferrara* the most interesting philological workshop on the *Comedy* in our time.

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Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine Comedy, 2nd edition.

Christopher Kleinhenz and Kristina Olson, eds.

New York, NY: Modern Languages Association of America, 2020. 312 pp. \$65.

The 2020 *Approaches to Teaching Dante's Divine Comedy* edited by Kristina Olson and Christopher Kleinhenz at once complements and expands Carol Shade's 1982 edition, detailing major advancements and transformations in the pedagogical practices of American Dante studies over the last three decades. The excellence of the volume lies in the editors' ability as conductors of a symphonic conversation across teaching practices and educational contexts, research backgrounds and scholarly expertise. While Slade's volume stood granitically centered on a "more traditionally focused Dante pedagogy" (p. xii), Kleinhenz and Olson's collection embraces the ever-shifting horizons of the discipline in both teaching and learning, stirred by "new research in material philology, cultural studies and literary theory" (p. xii), digital humanities and creative writing.

The macro-structure of the volume distinguishes between 'Materials' and 'Approaches'. In the former, the editors' annotated bibliography is a comprehensive, highly practical aid to both first- and old-timer instructors. Among the wealth of editions, translations, critical studies and articles, the "Instructor's Library" records the appearance of new, up-and-coming journals (like our very own *Bibliotheca Dantesca*), "two clusters of essays on teaching Dante" in *Pedagogy* as well as detail the expansion of reception studies and multiplication of digital humanities projects. The 2020-publication date robbed the editors' the chance to include the outburst of works of highly-teachable potential launched for the 2021 Centenary such as Laura Ingallinella's Wiki Education project - developed with her students at Wellesley College and retraces and reinscribes the memory of the women featured in the *Comedy*. Or the online exhibition (<https://www.commediadivinaonlineexhibition.com/>) created by the recently established Centre for Dante Studies in Ireland of 'La Commedia Divina' by Liam

O' Broin (now on display at Dublin Castle): the 100 lithographs are fully searchable and accompanied by original musical compositions.

The editors' introductory essay discusses the results of a survey on the courses delivered across "eighty-five colleges and universities" including "one community college and one high school" and within "a variety of departments: forty-three in languages and literatures; twenty-nine in English and comparative literature; and ten in other humanities-related fields" (p. 34). The data anticipates what the essays variously tackle: that the teaching of the *Comedy* is not a monolithic construct or a one-way road. Rather, it is a layered, protean-like enterprise where, as F. Regina Psaki aptly observes, "certainly the context of the encounter determines the kind of teaching materials we can use, the assignments we can design, and the learning outcomes we can aim for" (p. 80). The essays articulate how the choice of approach, and the selection of cantos are highly dependent on factors such as nature of the courses (term or year-long; general education, Italian-specific, comparatist; credit or non-credit bearing), of the program (general education; Italian majors) and of the teaching institution (secular and Catholic; state, community and college; high-schools and correction facilities). The age, the socio-cultural and even religious background of the students are equally influential for instructors' strategies for making the poem "relevant" to students' cultural formation and personal histories, hence limiting "the potential for [historical, linguistic and cultural] alienation" (Roznak, p. 170). In this regard, the volume effectively demonstrates the evolution of the classroom into a vibrant space of collaboration, exchange and reciprocal growth where new methods, tools, resources and modes of reading the text are discovered, tested and perfected.

These advancements in the teacher-learner relationship are showcased throughout the five subsections of 'Approaches'. In the first, 'Textual traditions, language and Authority', Barolini reflects on Dante's very own "authorial pedagogy" and how his "protocols" put readers "in a continuous cognitive deficit, always challenging them to work for understanding" (p. 39). Reaching beyond the inner textual dimension, Storey's and Magni's material philology argues that by encountering "firsthand and tangibly" (p. 57) manuscripts and early printed editions, their paleographical and book-historical analysis heightens students' appreciation of underlying the architecture of the page, and awareness of "the culture that receives and reproduces the *Comedy*, the patron who requests a copy of the work and the book's production as artifact" (p.52).

Martinez, Filosa, Deen Schildgen, Psaki and Eisner pursue alternative paths into the *Comedy*'s dialogic use of the Bible ("the dimension of Dante's writings hardest to impart to contemporary students", Martinez, p. 62), Of classical and vernacular culture. Filosa shares a set of "class activities as tools" (p. 67) for training students' in "various modes of textual analysis" that unearth Dantean rewritings of Virgil, Ovid, Lucan and Homer. Deen Schildgen expands the discussion to encompass "Greco-Roman legacy", inclusive of "Arabic learning and philosophy" (p. 73). Moving onto vernacular literature, Psaki advocates for student's direct engagement with the very primary "sources that Dante knew and invoked" (p. 80) in both classroom teaching and end-of-year assignments. Parallel readings, she argues, "mobilize[s] students in actively interpreting Beatrice and the pilgrim's love for her through the lenses of both the *Comedy* and its intertexts" (p. 82), courtly love or

romance. Eisner shows the advantages of placing three moments of *Inferno* “at the center of a dialogue with the medieval and modern poetic tradition” embodied by modernist authors like Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Pound. Similarly, Havely’s comparative assessment of British, American and Swiss courses on Dante’s reception in modern and contemporary literature detail the productiveness of reading (and rewriting) the *Comedy* across national and territorial borders, historical periods and foreign agents of transmission.

Gary Cestaro’s path-breaking ‘Teaching Dante LGBTQ’ leads the second section on ‘Society and Ethics’. The essay “historicizes the notion of gender identity” and demonstrates how a vertical reading of the *Comedy* “reflects notions of same-sex desire that both reinforce and undermine the gender binary”, that are “both gender separatist and gender transitive” (p. 107). Olson outlines three critical reading modes for mediating polemic attitudes and political divide caused by Dante’s problematic construction of women and female gender: treating the women of the *Comedy* as historical characters; reading the moments of misogynist rhetoric as inherent to a historiographical mode; and unpacking language as a gendered construction. Drell’s history courses offer another example of an interdisciplinary teaching context where the contrastive study of Dante’s “historical memory” and “historical records” can train students’ “evaluation of sources, disentangling and reconciling conflicting contemporary accounts, historical understanding” (p. 120). Dameron and Contino detail their experiences of teaching the theology of the poem, tackling its “complex religious and moral themes” (p. 29) and medieval church history: elements to which students’ from Catholic Colleges are more familiar and inclined to grasp and appreciate. Roush and Hawkins tackle students’ engagement with Dantean ethics. The first stimulates self-reflection through exercises of proactive, “contemporary and personal” reimagining of “aspects of *Comedy*” (p. 138) via visual, aural and creative or journalistic writing. For the other, ethical awareness derives from the “transhistorical connection to the vicissitudes of Dante’s life and Dante-pilgrim”, asking oneself “what would it be like to be exiled or made a refugee as millions of people in Africa and the Middle East currently are?” and “who would they even be once all the familiar guarantors of identity were taken away?” (p. 150).

Within the discourse on ‘The Reception of the *Comedy*’, Aideh centers on the application of the art historical method and the compare-contrast approach to medieval and modern visualization of the *Comedy*, giving precise instructions on the selection of the artefacts and their analysis. More creatively, Webb devises “a new way to look” rooted in a multi-directional reading of the poem, moving between parts “in the most fruitful ways, opening up new hermeneutical possibilities” (p. 166). Defying the apparent structural fixity of the poem, students “seek out connections” and “pick out strands of signification” across the canticles (p. 169). Roznack’s counteraction to students’ lack of “investment in premodern text they feel removed from the contemporary moment” (p. 170) is by exploring how “Dante’s work becomes newly interesting and relevant” (p. 171) when read in light of Naylor’s *Linden Hills*, a contemporary African American which reshapes Dante’s Hell through direct appropriation and rewriting. Ciabattoni delineates Dante’s reception history in modern music while also discussing how internal references to sacred, liturgical and secular music reveal “the *Commedia* as the product of this

dynamic medieval interdisciplinary culture” (p. 183). Coggeshall discusses charting Dante’s presence in contemporary and popular media, detailing lessons and activities employed to let students become “savvy cultural consumers” and critical awareness of “how a single text can invite multiple interpretations” (p. 186). Finally, Essary describes the advantages of combining traditional textual approaches with an immersive gaming experience. Venturing through the digital narrative constructed by the “Dante’s Inferno” PS3 videogame, students reflect on the architectural and imaginative reading of the poem carried out by game-designers, while also with the text at a multimedial-level as well as “using accuracies and inaccuracies as valuable” evidence of (mis-)reading (p. 196).

Directly engaged with ‘Instructional contexts and pedagogical strategies’, in the final section of the volume Sowell evaluates the vast array of English translations and their different usability within varying teaching contexts and levels. Hagedorn promotes a particular type of close-reading exercises within general literature courses, where students unpack the stylistic features of Dantes “damned rhetoric” by reading it “in conjunction” with classical hypotexts, gaining awareness of “the innovations of his autobiographical and spiritual queste” and surprising redeployment of “figures of the epic tradition” (p. 211). Marchesi exemplifies situational teaching, documenting the array of strategies deployed to facilitate the engagement of first-year students in the reading of the *Comedy* through the “interplay between course-long assignments and in-class exercises” (p. 216). These stimulate textual memory, the ability to formulate critical questions and a certain “responsibility” (p. 215) for knowledge produced through research. Applauso argues creative writing empowers “students to put theory into practice”, using their “original content” – in that case, a moral system of Inferno ‘of their own making – to grasp “theoretical concepts in connection to literature and poetry” (p. 224). At a more specialized and technologically advanced level, Haynes’ scaffolding approach resorted to blog-posting as a research tool that would stimulate classroom discussion and collaborative learning through classroom discussion on hermeneutic issues of their choosing. Whereas Chiodo’s “tagging exercise” exploited the “tag” function of a Wordpress blog to display the advantages of digital humanities tools in the classroom (p. 259). Returning to analogical methods, Gorman focused on the challenges of teaching “Dante in a lower-level course to build skills in textual analysis” (p. 239) among non-traditional students: an approach shared by Levenstein teaching the *Commedia* at a selective, secular independent school in New York City. The volume closes with Herzman’s experience of teaching Dante within state correctional facilities, contexts where students have no prior literary knowledge but are able to establish a direct, intimate connection between the characters of the *Inferno* and their own life. He also details the struggle with reconciling “trusting” Dante as “a truth teller and an authority” (p. 253). An issue that builds on the practical difficulty of “bringing the writing skills to the level” of their affective, verbal “interpretation”; nevertheless, the receptiveness of the students demonstrates that “Dante is for everyone” (p. 255).

Overall, the volume has the rare power of infusing new life into teaching practices, inviting instructors to question and innovate their modes of reading, analyzing, and discussing the *Commedia* within diverse classroom environments. The edition is an outstanding contribution that goes beyond acknowledging how the

field has evolved over the past thirty years, to actively promote and produce that change by engendering a space of multidisciplinary exchange and collaboration.

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Katelynn Robinson.

The Sense of Smell in the Middle Ages: A Source of Certainty.

London–New York: Routledge, 2020. X + 228 pp. \$165 (pb. \$51).

Katelynn Robinson's book provides the first scholarly investigation into the theories of smell elaborated by Latin medieval scholars, from roughly 1100 until 1400 CE. The book also discusses actual applications of these theories in the medical and religious practices of the time. Robinson's study is motivated by an ambition to fill a twofold lacuna in current scholarship. On the one hand, by focusing especially on the late centuries of the Middle Ages, it aims to complement scholarship on the earlier phases of European history, which already boasts a number of well-researched studies. On the other hand, by providing an exploration of medieval olfactory theories, Robinson has the merit of focusing on topics neglected by scholars, who have traditionally been more interested in studying the cultural practices related to smells than in unpacking the complex theoretical views supporting them. These theories, which are discussed at length in the works of leading medieval schoolmen such as Albert the Great, William of St.-Thierry, Vincent of Beauvais, and Bartholomew the Englishman (to mention only a few), are the result of a long and often-tortuous process of *translatio* from the Greek world into the Latin one through the mediation of Arabic thinkers. Robinson reconstructs the main trajectories of this journey by relying on the Latin translations of Greek (Aristotle, Galen) and Arabic scholars (Avicenna, Haly Abbas) produced during the Middle Ages. In addition to this, Robinson shows how Latin medieval views of olfaction were far from being simply the object of mere intellectual speculations, for they served in fact as theoretical foundation to two crucial spheres of medieval life: medicine and religious practice.

The book is composed of three parts, each one consisting of two chapters. Part 1, entitled "The anatomy and physiology of olfaction", discusses the development of medieval olfactory theory from its Greco-Arabic background. Robinson shows that the "mainstream" theory of olfaction that Latin medieval thinkers elaborate starting from the twelfth century was the result of a long-standing quarrel that originated in the Greek world and was later taken over by prominent Arabic philosophers and physicians. Aristotle was allegedly the first to express the difficulty of defining smell in rigorously philosophical terms. Its objects, odors, are very difficult to describe, as opposed to, for instance, colors and sounds. The very names we use for odors, he continues, are derived from the sense of taste – we say that something smells sweet because we know that it tastes sweet, but we do not have a proper vocabulary for odors. Because of its relation to taste, smell occupies a middle